

## Rep. Nadler Statement on Soviet Jewish Freedom Resolution

Monday, 29 October 2007

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Congressman Jerrold Nadler (NY-08) today spoke on the House floor in support of H.Res. 759, a resolution “Recognizing the 40th Anniversary of the Mass Movement for Soviet Jewish Freedom and the 20th Anniversary of the Freedom Sunday Rally for Soviet Jewry on the Mall in Washington, D.C.”

“I am gratified to represent the largest community of former Soviet émigrés in the United States, and I have the great fortune of knowing many of those leaders and entrepreneurs who owe their livelihoods and freedom to the success of that movement,” said Rep. Nadler. “The former Soviet Jewish community of Brooklyn, New York — from Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Uzbekistan and elsewhere — has returned in spades the humanity and kindness shown to them years before in their new capacity as industrious, law abiding and dynamic members of American society.”

His full statement follows:

“Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.Res. 759, a resolution introduced by my distinguished colleague, Mr. Waxman of California, marking the 40th anniversary of the Mass Movement for Soviet Jewish Freedom and the 20th anniversary of the Freedom Sunday Rally for Soviet Jewry on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. I am proud to be an original co-sponsor.

“Mr. Speaker, in 1967 the plight of Soviet Jews was severe and largely unknown to the outside world. State-sponsored anti-Zionism and a widespread culture of anti-Semitism made daily life difficult for the millions of Jews living within the Soviet Union. Worst of all, these Jews had no right to leave the country for more welcoming parts of the world, namely Israel and the United States.

“Mr. Speaker, in answer to this reality, 1967 saw the rise of an organized movement to rescue the Soviet Jews, the Mass Movement for Soviet Jewish Freedom. Looking back 40 years later, we can all chart the profound success of that movement, which lifted hundreds of thousands out of persecution and poverty. Beginning in 1971, this movement made possible the mass exodus of Soviet Jews from the Soviet Union to the shores of Israel, the United States and elsewhere.

“Mr. Speaker, I am gratified to represent the largest community of former Soviet émigrés in the United States, and I have the great fortune of knowing many of those leaders and entrepreneurs who owe their livelihoods and freedom to the success of that movement organized in 1967. The former Soviet Jewish community of Brooklyn, New York — from Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Uzbekistan and elsewhere — has returned in spades the humanity and kindness shown to them years before in their new capacity as industrious, law abiding and dynamic members of American society. In neighborhoods like Brighton Beach, Coney Island and Bensonhurst, you can witness every day how hard they have worked in order to secure happiness for their families and how they strive to give back to the nation that rescued them from the specter of persecution.

“Mr. Speaker, no discussion of this movement of Soviet Jews would be complete without mention of Jacob Birnbaum, an exceptional leader and human being who worked night and day to bring this issue to the forefront of our minds so many years ago. Earlier this year, I was very proud to introduce a resolution in honor of Mr. Birnbaum, and I am pleased that Congress passed it, thereby bringing official recognition to a leader who made an incalculable difference for the lives of many thousands of Soviet Jews and others throughout the world. In the mid-1950s and early 1960s, Mr. Birnbaum became involved in assisting people from the disintegrating Jewish communities of North Africa caught up in the struggles of their host countries for independence from France.

“His activism did not end then. After traveling to the United States, he decided to create a national student organization to activate the grassroots of American Jewry. Settling in New York in 1964, he set up his first student committee; then he concentrated on building a student core at Yeshiva University. Mr. Birnbaum named the new organization the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (SSSJ).

“Finally, he called a national founding meeting at Columbia University on April 27, 1964, followed by a large student demonstration four days later on the Soviet holiday May Day in front of the Soviet United Nations Mission. The authoritative Center for Jewish History has listed the demonstration as the beginning of the public struggle for the freedom of Soviet Jewry. Many consider this action as the reason to consider Mr. Birnbaum the father of the movement to liberate Soviet Jewry.

“In addition to the courageous work of Mr. Birnbaum, tribute ought to be paid to the pioneers and the other national organizations which fought so strenuously for the liberation of Soviet Jews. Such organizations include the Greater New York Conference on Soviet Jewry, whose founding director was Malcolm Hoenlein. Mr. Hoenlein is currently the executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish organizations.

“I am pleased to join today with my colleagues to mark the accomplishments of the Soviet Jewry movement and to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Freedom Rally for Soviet Jews and the 40th anniversary of the founding of the movement to free Soviet Jews.

“Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the resolution, and I yield back the balance of my time.”

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